



PenWest Plan

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City of Columbus

Downtown Columbus , Inc.

Feinknopf Macioce Schappa Architects

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DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT FOR PENWEST

The PenWest district is an area of downtown Columbus bordered by the Olentangy River on the west, the Scioto River and Spring Street on the south, Front Street on the east, and I-670 on the north. It is located in the northwest quadrant of downtown.

This area is close to downtown, yet it is separated because of the substantial differences in architectural styles and land uses which are not typical of the rest of downtown. Much of the area is also separated from downtown by the 22 acre Ohio Penitentiary.

The primary development concepts which are foreseen for this area includes:

1. Development of unused and underused sites, and renovation of existing buildings;
2. Strong pedestrian and vehicular connections between the district and downtown Columbus;
3. An enhanced northwestern gateway into downtown via the Spring/Long corridor and the Nationwide-Goodale Connector;
4. Encouragement of commercial development along Spring Street to complement the redevelopment of the district;
5. Stimulation of mixed-use developments within the district;
6. Creation of opportunities for urban campus development on large undeveloped tracts of land; and
7. Integration of the Penitentiary site with the remainder of the district and with the downtown core.

The PenWest area can become a special part of downtown, an area in which current industrial uses coexist with new uses within transformed older buildings. It can be an area in which large tracts of unused and underused land are transformed into a variety and mix of innovative uses which are needed downtown, but which are not typically found there because of higher land prices and development costs. The PenWest area is the industrial heart of Columbus, but it need make no apologies for its history and character. Rather, the PenWest is an area in which new and old combine to a mixture of opportunities, land uses, and urban amenities.

HISTORY AND CHARACTER

Although the PenWest district does not have a clear identity as a district, this portion of downtown Columbus does have a rich history and character. Originally part of Liberty Township, a later boundary change left it Montgomery Township until it was finally annexed by the City of Columbus in 1864.

Throughout its history the PenWest district has been home to several industrial and manufacturing companies. Buildings housed a variety of 19th and early 20th-century industries including a buggy manufacturer (now known as The Buggyworks), Jaeger Machine Company (the world's largest manufacturer of cement mixers), and the Union Fork and Hoe (one of the nation's largest producers of garden tools). This area has generally retained its industrial complexion with several large structures tightly bordering the streets.

Most notable of the structures remaining in the area is the old Ohio Penitentiary. With construction beginning in 1833, it served as a penal institution until 1984. The Ohio Penitentiary has imprisoned thousands within its walls, including the notable Confederate raider, General John Hunt Morgan, who somehow escaped in 1863, and the noted author O. Henry. However, its most recent history is neither as intriguing nor colorful as its distant past. Since its closing on September 20, 1984, the 22-acre facility has slowly deteriorated. Not even the massive walls are immune from decay.

The Penitentiary's imposing thirty-foot high stone walls form a physical barrier to the east of the district. The northern boundary is formed by the railroad yards which also separate the district from the residential areas known today as Victorian, Thurber, and Italian Villages, and from the old North Market area, now rebounding as a mixed-use neighborhood. The Olentangy and Scioto Rivers create the western and southern boundaries.

Some might view the area's industrial complexion and the boundaries separating it from the rest of the city as liabilities. However, these traits can become assets. There is the potential to create a positive image and identity, and there are many unused or underused sites and buildings with which to create this identity.

The purpose of this document is to help discover the resources which exist in the area and to suggest a conceptual development plan which will have a positive impact on PenWest.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The PenWest district has some of the largest tracts of undeveloped land in or around downtown Columbus. The PenWest district has not yet witnessed an areawide resurgence. One of the major land holders is the CSX Railroad. CSX owns approximately 83 acres in PenWest. Some of this ground will be taken by the improvements being made to I-670 and Route 315; however, the majority of this land which once served as a railroad service yard will remain untouched.

Other sites ready for development or redevelopment are the Ohio Penitentiary, which is owned by the State of Ohio, and the property along the Olentangy River, which is owned by the City of Columbus.

Large-sized parcels within the PenWest district allow a variety of development alternatives without requiring developers to assemble many small parcels from multiple owners. These parcels may be developed individually or in conjunction with adjacent parcels.

Current estimates place well over 1,250,000 square feet of industrial space within the PenWest district, excluding the buildings within the walls of the Penitentiary. This square footage is concentrated in a handful of large, old, manufacturing facilities containing spacious interiors. Many of the old manufacturing facilities are currently being used as warehouse storage, and a few buildings have been bought for conversion into downtown office and residential loft space. -

Currently, the area is predominantly used for manufacturing and distribution. Approximately forty companies occupy facilities within the district, several of which represent significant investments. Total employment (largely in the manufacturing and distribution sector) approaches 1000 people.

Over 297 acres exist within the PenWest district; about 166 acres are undeveloped tracts of land.

OBSTACLES

There are two challenges to the development of the PenWest district. One is perceived, and the other real. By concentrating on and overcoming the real, or physical challenge, perceptions of the district will change.

Today, the PenWest district stands as an island, separated from downtown Columbus by railroad yards, the river, and the old Penitentiary. These physical barriers can become an amenity through the introduction of a link between Nationwide Boulevard and Dublin Avenue. This will create a convenient way of accessing the area.

Other challenges include opening landlocked parcels of ground. These parcels contain an abandoned railroad service yard, and are bound by a track which sees minimal use. By possibly rerouting train traffic, the railroads may open that land to development without disrupting or losing service to customers on that line.

With few concessions, these obstacles can be overcome, a positive image will be realized, and the PenWest district can emerge as a prominent part of downtown Columbus.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this plan are simple: to remove existing major barriers to development and to allow the amenities of this area and its geographic location to attract development. A further objective is to enhance the image of the district. This will be accomplished by complementing the bold architectural statements of major buildings in the area, and by using strong development themes to link to the existing infrastructure, new freeway systems, and proposed infrastructure. These objectives will be achieved by the following methods:

- Maintain an industrial design character for buildings and streetscape.

- Open up access to the district by penetrating the Penitentiary site.
- Emphasize downtown proximity as a development theme, while retaining the district's character.
- Feature the proximity to all major freeway systems as a major amenity.

These proposals work within the policies, which have been established as current planning guidelines. The adopted policies can be found in the North Riverbend and Olentangy Corridor sections of the Riverfront Plan (1985):

The old Penitentiary walls should remain to create an environment for a strong theme or campus development that uses water imagery to create a link to the river.

Loft apartments, limited specialty retail, low-to-medium density offices and light service industry are acceptable uses in the rehabilitation areas east and west of the Penitentiary.

Riverfront property south of Long Street should be set aside primarily for east-west pedestrian access. However, midrise housing and/or offices could coexist.

Develop riverfront housing, restaurants and entertainment uses taking advantage of the Olentangy River setting and existing architecturally unique structures.

ACCESSIBILITY

A primary inducement to development revolves around providing easy, convenient access to the PenWest district. This is being accomplished through many different means.

The primary improvement which will make this area more accessible is currently being implemented. The new Spring/Sandusky Interchange is scheduled to start construction in April of 1990. Completion is expected by November of 1994. This project is influential because it will close several of the freeway interchanges that currently feed downtown from Route 315 and I-670, and construct one main interchange that will enter and exit on Nationwide Boulevard, at the point where Nationwide ties into Marconi Boulevard. This means that traffic entering downtown from Route 315 and I-670 will be entering through the PenWest district.

Several obstacles divert traffic from the interior properties of the PenWest district. Perhaps the most imposing of these barriers is the Penitentiary itself. The Penitentiary walls have created a physical barrier separating the western portion of the district from the rest of downtown.

One alternative is to eliminate these liabilities by extending Nationwide Boulevard through the Penitentiary and connecting it with Dublin Avenue¹. The map of the PenWest district shows that Nationwide Boulevard and Dublin Avenue align almost perfectly (*map not available in Internet version*). The size of the Penitentiary can be downscaled by breaking it into two manageable pieces. The Northern parcel is approximately 8 acres, and the Southern parcel is approximately 13.5 acres. The northern parcel lends itself as being an ideal site for a proposed multi-purpose arena. The southern parcel and the surrounding undeveloped area provide ample room for support services. With the opening of the new Convention Center on North High Street, the area will become a core for special events and activities. The walls of the Penitentiary will no longer be thought of as impenetrable, but will now act as a gateway to welcome visitors to Columbus.

This strategy will link the new interchange entrance into downtown with the main artery of the district (the new Nationwide Boulevard). Dublin Avenue will then be incorporated into Nationwide Boulevard, and Nationwide will extend from Front Street west to the Olentangy River. Dublin Avenue will not need to be modified. The existing traffic patterns feeding off Dublin Avenue will remain intact. The current infrastructure will be flexible enough to allow for a variety of development solutions while still providing a circulation pattern through the

¹ The Planning Division, City of Columbus, points out that the Ohio Penitentiary site is potentially eligible for National Register listing. In the event the site is listed on the National Register, Federal requirements mandate an examination of alternatives for actions impacting historic properties before any Federal funding could be sought or assured.

area. Future traffic planning must consider truck traffic, residential, and office uses, as well as traffic generated by the proposed multi-purpose civic arena.

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

PenWest's design philosophy is simple. The plan intends to preserve the significant buildings in the district and to develop a set of standards to assure that new structures blend into the area with the same industrial character. These standards will be monitored by a community association which will discuss issues and help implement development in the PenWest district. These philosophies will also carry over into infrastructure and streetscape designs, which should have the same turn-of-the-century industrial character as the architecture of this district.

ARCHITECTURE

Even though building styles are somewhat diverse, their original functions were similar (factories, mills, and warehouses). These structures were built to support heavy loads and to accommodate machinery, inventory, and the people who worked there. The buildings which remain today are sound structures of masonry, concrete, and large timbers with wide-open floor plans and facades that can easily be adapted. The facades are clad with glass, concrete and masonry. These were the basic materials which provided buildings with the ventilation, sunlight, and insulation they needed. All penetrations (windows and doors) in the facade fit within the framework of the industrial structures.

This simplicity of design allows for flexible and cost-effective renovation of elevations as well as floor plans, and suggests a standard by which all existing buildings can be renovated and all new structures should be built. Such standards can, for the most part, be left to the discretion of the developer and architect to maintain; to downtown Columbus, Inc. to review; and to the Development Regulations Division of the City of Columbus to monitor. This approach will allow creativity and diversity to flourish without being stifled by restrictions.

This industrial theme should be carried over into designing the streetscape. The existing profile exists as one in which the buildings tightly border the streets with no greenbelts. This profile will be maintained in an overall redevelopment plan. This does not mean that areas of planting cannot be created. The street profile itself can be enhanced with decorative light poles and trees, while the development of side gardens can be promoted. Side gardens are a variation of pocket parks similar to Paley Park and Green Acres in New York City, or Arch Park in Columbus. Side gardens are greenbelt paths between buildings, or small garden parks nestled in alcoves, to provide pedestrians with a haven from the rigor of the industrial environment. This urban design technique allows the district to preserve an industrial image and yet provide the people who live and work in PenWest a relief from its climate.

UTILITIES

While the PenWest district makes no effort to disguise its industrial nature, additional overhead utilities, transmission towers and lines, telecommunication towers and other infrastructure can, if not properly sited, diminish the development potential of particular sites. This is particularly true along the river corridor and along the major gateway streets into the district. It should be the policy of downtown Columbus, Inc. and the City of Columbus to review the placement of new utility infrastructure within the district, with the objective of minimizing the visual impact on the downtown skyline, the river corridor, and the major thoroughfares into the district.

In general, it is the policy of downtown Columbus, Inc. and the City of Columbus to encourage the placement of radio, television, microwave, cellular telephone, and other transmission and reception facilities on rooftops rather than at ground level. This helps minimize the aesthetic effect of such new equipment on the urban landscape.

GRAPHICS

As this document was being prepared, a temporary ban on erection of new off-premise graphics within the downtown was in place. downtown Columbus, Inc. will make recommendations to the City's Graphic

Commission, the Development Department, and City Council regarding off-premise graphics within the entire downtown area. A survey of the downtown area undertaken by downtown Columbus, Inc. with the help of the Development Regulations Division of the City of Columbus indicates that there are very few potential billboard sites available in the downtown for which permits might still be issued. Two or three of the possible remaining sites are in the PenWest district. If the appropriate height variances were obtained, one or two additional billboards could be located in the far northwest corner of the district, oriented toward the northbound lanes of the new Spring-Sandusky interchange. It is also possible that another billboard could be located on the new off-ramp connection with Neil Avenue and Nationwide Boulevard. However, these are major gateways into the PenWest district and new off-premise graphics are not desirable in these locations.

In general, it will be the policy of downtown Columbus, Inc., and the City of Columbus to discourage erection of new off-premise graphics within the PenWest area. For commercial graphics on buildings, business and property owners should work together to integrate the design of signs into the architectural facade of buildings.

LAND USE

Presently, the majority of the PenWest district falls under the zoning classification of Manufacturing (M). The plan's intention is not to rezone the area for two reasons: first, because the Manufacturing classification is broad and easily rezoned; and secondly, because manufacturing and distribution uses are still important within this district (total employment of manufacturers and distributors in the area approaches 1000). We believe that any zoning changes made at this time would be premature and may place additional constraints on current business owners as well as developers.

The more practical approach is to outline possible uses for parcels and buildings which reflect the attributes and amenities that a site has to offer. For example, the amenity associated with a river location would be an attraction for residential living. The most significant amenity for commercial development is the proximity to the downtown core. Rail access offers a significant amenity to a manufacturer.

The PenWest district borders downtown Columbus and can provide inexpensive commercial and office space with exceptional access to all freeway systems and other downtown locations. The area further provides a substantial inventory of manufacturing zoned land with both rail and highway access. Businesses can benefit from proximity to the downtown core with few inconveniences. For example, downtown rush hour traffic within PenWest is minimal (all interchange entrances are less than 1/8 mile away) and there is generally no difficulty in finding adjacent parking. These are only some of the amenities offered by PenWest that few downtown locations can match.

The City of Columbus owns substantial riverfront properties, including the old Municipal Electric Plant. The City should develop a specific policy regarding the disposition of these properties to assist planners and developers in considering alternatives for the sites.

Environmental issues within the district will require vigilance as areas are redeveloped.

COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Community planning will become necessary as major developments, such as the proposed multi-purpose civic arena, are implemented. downtown Columbus, Inc. proposes to work closely with property owners, tenants, businesses and City and County departments and agencies as development in the PenWest area proceeds. An organization that would convene to discuss and act on development proposals would most closely resemble a neighborhood association. Feinknopf Macioce Schappa Architects have offered additional consulting assistance to such a group.

Formal reviews of proposed rezonings, demolitions, streetscape improvements, and other development proposals will, for the foreseeable future, continue to be carried out by the Development Regulations Division of the City of Columbus, in cooperation with downtown Columbus, Inc. and the Planning Division (Development Department). It is the intention of downtown Columbus, Inc. to rely on an association or coalition of property owners, tenants, and businesses in the PenWest area to provide insight and guidance to these reviews.

PROSPECTIVE PROJECTS

However obscure, the PenWest area has not gone unnoticed. Plans have been developed which utilize this district as sites for a downtown residential complex and for a multipurpose civic arena. These two projects have been stimulated by the area's unique potential. Nowhere else in the city of Columbus could be found the favorable combination of freeway accessibility, site size, proximity to the downtown core, and reasonable development cost.

ARENA

In May, 1989, downtown Columbus, Inc. was asked by the Mayor to conduct a study of the feasibility of constructing a multipurpose civic and sports arena for Columbus. In December, downtown Columbus, Inc. reported that there is a substantial need for such an arena, and that the Ohio Penitentiary site is the preferred downtown location. The arena would accommodate a full range of entertainment programming including -professional and collegiate sports events, concerts, family shows, and numerous miscellaneous uses.

The Ohio Penitentiary site is comprised of approximately 22 acres, well in excess of the five to six acres required for the arena building. The additional area may, in the short term, be developed as parking. Ultimately, the remaining acreage will provide a variety of retail and office facilities.

It is expected that the construction of a civic and sports arena on the Penitentiary site will create substantial economic benefits in the PenWest area. New opportunities for hotel, restaurant, and other event and convention related types of business can be expected. The economic impact for the community as a whole for construction alone is estimated at three-quarters of a million dollars. Over five years, the community economic impact is conservatively estimated at over \$90 million.

RESIDENTIAL COMPLEX

A major residential development has been proposed at the western end of the extension of Nationwide Boulevard and culminating the river. The residential development would occupy 26.65 acres of land and would feature a 3.5 acre lake, surrounded by 434 residential units. Part of the land on which this development would occur is currently owned by the City of Columbus. The prospective developer would bring to the project considerable experience in the development of large-scale residential properties.

It would be the intent of such a venture to develop a low-rise community of townhouses and flats which would have all the amenities of a suburban residential complex - but also with immediate accessibility to the downtown core, the river, and the riverfront park system.

It is believed that visibility from the newly constructed Spring/Sandusky interchange and accessibility from the extension of Nationwide Boulevard will make living in this riverfront community very desirable to a great number of downtown workers and empty-nesters who wish to benefit from and contribute to the excitement of a growing central city.

PARKLAND

Some members of the community who were involved in planning for the PenWest area have proposed a major downtown park as the primary future land use for the entire PenWest Area. Residential development, in this concept, could take place on the perimeter of the PenWest area, especially along the river corridor.

A group consisting of developers, property owners, and members of the downtown Columbus, Inc. Design Review Committee toured the area with this concept in mind. While it is agreed that the PenWest area offers opportunities for residential development in a campus-like setting, as well as future location for "pocket-parks, the Committee agrees that downtown park development is best concentrated along the river corridor, at the Scioto Peninsula (former Central High School) site, and possibly further south along the Scioto between Interstates 70/71 and Greenlawn Avenue. At current land acquisition costs of \$12.50 to \$25.00 per square foot (\$544,000.00 to \$1,089,000.00 per acre) the scale of such a park development in the PenWest area would

appear larger than the public sector can commit to during the coming decades.

These prospective projects have been explored to take advantage of existing resources. However, the potential for these and other projects within the district will be lost, or worse, inappropriate development will occur if appropriate guidelines are not established and implemented.

CONCLUSION

The success of this plan revolves around making PenWest an integral part of downtown Columbus. In the section labeled "DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS FOR THE PENWEST DISTRICT" a list of concepts were presented. By successfully implementing these concepts and addressing the challenges associated with them, the opportunity exists to give the PenWest district a downtown identity.

The development concepts for this area include:

1. Development in the area will be primarily infill among the existing buildings. The new buildings should be designed to complement the industrial architecture and character of the district.
2. Strong pedestrian and vehicular connections should be provided between the district and the Nationwide complex and the Greater Columbus Convention Center. The primary vehicular connection should be extended through the Ohio Penitentiary to Dublin Avenue. Sidewalks linking the area with the Convention Center and Nationwide complex should be landscaped and made attractive.
3. The primary corridors through the district - Spring and Long Streets - should be landscaped to provide a special entranceway to downtown Columbus. This area should be maintained as a park-like setting, encouraging people to walk across these streets from the PenWest district to the river. Additional "pocket parks should be spread throughout the district in key locations to provide relief for the industrial nature of the district. The area along the Nationwide-Goodale Connector which forms the northern boundary of the district should be landscaped to enhance it as a major entranceway to downtown.
4. Commercial development should be encouraged along Spring Street to complement the redevelopment of the district. This commercial development should include nightclubs, restaurants, motels and other automobile-oriented uses, although these should be designed to reflect the urban nature of the district. Parking can be provided in back of the buildings along Spring Street.
5. Mixed-use developments to include commercial and residential uses should be encouraged within the district. Many individual buildings would contain both kinds of uses.
6. The 20 acre site owned by the CSX Railroad on the northern edge of the district provides a special opportunity for an office, commercial, or industrial park which would contain substantial warehousing with office space in front.
7. A mixed-use development should be built around the proposed civic arena on the Ohio Penitentiary site. This development should include office, hotel and retail uses.

Once a formidable barrier to development, the Penitentiary site now has the potential to become the anchor for new development. The Penitentiary walls, once the grim symbol of social retribution, can now be reached to bring many new benefits to the Columbus community. The Penitentiary then becomes a gateway and an asset to its neighborhood rather than a barrier separating it from the rest of downtown.

In fact, the PenWest area contains several unique amenities: large tracts of relatively undeveloped land, generally inexpensive land prices, improving street and river access, and excellent proximity both to the downtown core and to the interstate highway network. In the past, those amenities have been overshadowed by the massive Penitentiary walls. In the future, as the Penitentiary site develops, the rest of the PenWest district will follow. With the cooperation of property owners and businesses, the City of Columbus, and downtown Columbus, Inc., this once forgotten corner of downtown can become one of its many assets.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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